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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses policy trends in American Indian higher education. Until the latter half of this century, teaching and learning diversity for American Indian students had meant assimilation into the white culture. It did not include retaining Indian value systems or beliefs, and against this background federal educational policies on Indian education were developed, funded, and prioritized. Higher education for American Indians has taken a markedly different turn since the birth of tribal colleges. In 1990, approximately 60% of American Indians enrolled in higher education attended locally controlled tribal colleges. These colleges must compete for funds with other educational programs within the Office of Indian Education Programs. Another strain on the federal Indian education budget is the dramatic increase in the number of people identifying themselves as American Indians. The real solution to creative policy formation for teaching diversity will require a commitment of federal funds. Attempts at upgrading educational quality for all Indian youth has resulted in increased numbers of American Indian teachers and administrators and a new focus on developing sensitivity to the special needs of students from diverse backgrounds. An unprecedented involvement of American Indians at all levels in the development of education policy, the continued growth of Indian college enrollment, and the potential wealth of American Indian nations in land and natural resources are all factors that can foster a new educational perspective incorporating diversity in philosophies and cultures. (SV)

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AMERICAN INDIAN EDUCATION: CULTURE & DIVERSITY IN THE 21ST CENTURY

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Introduction

Historically, the politics of teaching and learning diversity in Indian communities can be analyzed by assessing the impact of budgets and by their priorities. Diversity has not been valued in the political relations between the United States and various Indian nations. It has, in fact, been viewed as a constraint in the control of Indian policies and in the evaluation of programs in Indian education. A narrow perspective, which included the tendency to see all Indian nations as the same, permeated policies in Indian education until the latter half of this century. Until that time, teaching and learning diversity for Indian children meant "assimilation" into a white culture. It did not include retaining Indian value systems or beliefs and it is against this background that policies were developed and funded and prioritized.

The first formal agreement that the United States Government would provide educational assistance to an Indian tribe is found in a 1794 treaty with subsequent treaties also variously providing for education services. The Congress first acknowledged the federal responsibility to Indian education in an appropriation act in 1802 in which $15,000 was provided to "promote civilization among the friendly Indian tribes and to secure the continuance of their friendship." (National Advisory Council on Indian Education, 1988). This "civilization" was meant to include educating the Indians in the non-Indian lifestyle.

In 1969, the first annual report to the Congress of the United States from the National Advisory Council on Indian Education entitled Indian Education: A National Tragedy--A National Challenge was released. This report referenced historical documents which asserted that Indian educational policies included emphasis on attempts to wash "savage habits" out of a child's mind. In other instances, it quoted documents which referenced "converting the heathen" and "civilizing the savage" (NACIE, 1969).

The effects of these policies linger and , in reality, most American Indians today have been "processed" through an educational system which did not value diversity (Robbins, 1983).

One can trace the early history of Indian education in appropriation acts, legislation regarding use of abandoned military posts for education of Indian youth, and acts establishing off-reservation industrial boarding schools beginning in the 1880's. In 1921, the Snyder Act, 25 U.S.C. 12, was enacted, which provided that the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) shall direct, supervise, and expend such moneys as Congress may from time to time appropriate for the benefit, care, and assistance of the Indians throughout the United States for general support and "civilization" including education. This Act led to the establishment of many of the education programs administered by BIA.

In 1934, the Johnson-O'Malley act, 25 U.S.C. 452-456, was passed to provide the Secretary of the Interior with the authority to enter into contracts with a state or territory for the education, medical attention, agricultural assistance, and social welfare, including relief of distress, of Indians through the qualified agencies of such state or territory (National Advisory Council on Indian Education,1988)

The results of establishing policies through the control of purse strings has been that American Indian constituencies have been forced to compete with each other for the same dollar. Historically these budget decisions by Congress and the White House prioritize activities for both ED (Office of Indian Education Programs) and BOB (the Balance of the Bureau, which include trust responsibilities, water rights, roads, etc). These priorities have been set by bureaucrats within the last two presidential terms using Management by Objectives (MBO), Program Evaluation and Review Technique (PERT), and zero based budgeting. They have been set as responses to constituencies outside the Bureau of Indian Affairs and Department of Education's Office of Indian education programs in reaction to vocal, localized special interest groups. The priorities and the subsequent policy recommendations which are made to Congress rarely have the support of

the Tribal Chairmen's Association , the National Indian School Board Association, or other Indian advocate groups.

The politics of education, specifically Indian education, remains a relatively large uncharted area. Studies in educational policy are generally concerned with three issues: 1) the allocative effects of political actions--who gets what, when, and how; 2) the nature of the present educational-political system and changes in its characteristics over time; 3) the effectiveness of the system in reaching desirable policy objectives--e.g. innovation, increased fiscal support, community participation (Kirst and Mosher, 1969). This paper will assess the three issues as they have impacted higher educational policy for American Indians and as they influence patterns for the future.

Higher Education for American Indians

Higher education for American Indians has taken a markedly different turn since the birth of tribal colleges. Prior to the late 1960's, Haskell Institue (now Indian Junior College in Lawrence, Kansas, Southwestern Indian Polytechic in Albuquerque, and the Institute of American Indian Arts in Santa Fe, New Mexico represented the federal involvement in higher educational opportunities for American Indians.

With the establishment of Navajo Community College in 1968, and Sinte Gleska College in 1971, local higher educational institutions began to address the post-secondary drop-out rate among tribal members. The high number of dropouts can be attributed, in part, to the lack of financial support for individual efforts. This lack of support was a reflection of the current federal policies on spending. Specifically, current policies did not view higher education for American Indians as a responsibility of Congress imbedded in treaty or trust activities.

Tribally controlled colleges set policies to respond to perceptions of failure which were evidenced by such indicators as financial aid limitations and cultural isolation, including family-kinship problems. (Bordeaux, 1991). Still, the growth of tribal colleges

has resulted in an outcry by state officials who assert that tribal colleges are competing with state colleges and universities for the same student and ultimately, the same dollar.

In 1990 approximately 12,000 Indian students, representing sixty per cent of the American Indian population in higher education, attended locally controlled tribal colleges (Bordeaux, 1991). The fact that this number has grown since the first college opened in Tsaile, Arizona in 1968 can be viewed as an indication that among Indian people the preservation of diverse cultures is a high priority. The fact that tribal colleges continue to grow in enrollment and in establishment of programs is an indication that policies reflecting diversity have set higher education in motion for the twenty first century.

Within the framework of P. L. 93-638 (Indian Self-Determination), tribes have exercised the option of developing policies and organizations to operate local tribally controlled community colleges. These colleges, in many cases, have strong grass-root support for the concept of local control of curricula, policies, and particularly, purse strings. Some of the colleges have struggled; others have survived; still others have surpassed expectations and continue to gain in credibility and support. Whether or not one supports the assumptions of Self-Determination and whether or not one endorses the growth and establishment of regional community colleges, the fact remains that these colleges are now in the same situation as other educational programs within the Office of Indian Education Programs, e.g. they are now competing with the others. The the budget has to be divided for more people.

Within recent years, one junior college program which had been funded out of the same budget moved to an alternative funding structure. In Santa Fe, the American Indian Art Institute benefited from legislation which removed it from competition with other programs within the Bureau of Indian Affairs by separating it from the BIA and establishing it as a separate line item in the federal budget, similar to that of Gallaudet and Howard. Other Indian programs may have to look at this alternative funding for survival.

With initial reports of the 1990 census, another phenomena is appearing. Census officials are finding a dramatic increase in the number of people who identify themselves as American Indians. Tribes have seen an increase in the number of applications for enrollment. The heritage of American Indians has been seen recently in more romantic terms and society has accepted the stereotypes of the media. This, along with the fact that the government has set aside waivers for Indian owned businesses, has made tribal identification more popular.

Others individuals indicate that they were ashamed of their Indian heritage and hid it in the past. Now that it is seen as beneficial, tribes have been popularized. Since 1960 the government count of American Indians has tripled to an estimated 1.8 million. The latest Census Bureau information showing eighty per cent of the states reporting also shows a 38 percent increase in self-identified American Indians from the previous (1980) census. Note, too, that Indian people remain the only ethnic group in this country which requires a proof of ethnicity. Tribal officials who control tribal enrollments recognize a blood quantum from a range of 1/200th to one-half as a minimum (Johnson, 1991). This trend will affect the budget for Indian education as more people become eligible without a proportionate increase in the budget, and it will affect internal policies, since proof of tribal membership brings voting rights within the tribe.

In January, 1991, the Center for Indian Education at Arizona State University hosted the First Annual Conference of American Indian/Alaskan Native professors. The fifty or more participants represented individuals with established tenured perspectives, as well as, those with new perspectives of the professoriate. The agenda was reminiscent of accounts of council fires. Each participant had the opportunity to discuss or debate issues which were perceived as critical to the development of educational policy and the survival of Indian students in the century ahead. In this discussion , policy was invariably linked to discussions of money and the priorities which would be set by Congress for future budgets.

Critical to these discussions was an analogy that is frequently used in Indian education. The analogy is that of lobsters in a bucket. The same analogy was used in a recent Sports Illustrated article on Indian athletics (Shadow of a Nation, 1991). The analogy "speaks to" the tendency of a closed society, specifically American Indians, to value its "closedness". As such, the tribe is not willing to encourage individual members to be successful. For each opportunity that an individual has, others in the group find reasons to block the opportunity , i. e. each time one lobster tries to climb out of the bucket, others pull it back. Individual success in education (or any enterprise) is generally not valued. Yet, a major contradiction to this tendency is the fact that individuals, particularly politicians in local tribal elections, support education for tribal members . They represent education as a tool for economic improvement. This major contradiction in the value placed on education must be addressed in order for Indian education to be perceived as valuing the diversity of Indian nations.

Most of the inter-tribal political "lobstering" has resulted in one of those occasions wherein history has repeated itself. Historians and anthropologists reported that those Indians who moved to reservations first and who became acculturated first were generally the beneficiaries of more lenient policies from the government. In some cases, they were also rewarded monetarily. Money and food were used to reward compliance. These people may, or may not, have represented the legitimate governmental structure and policy-making body of the tribe. In other words, treaties were, in some cases, signed by small bands or groups and the individuals who signed had no intention, or perhaps conceptualization, that their actions would govern others. Cultural ignorance or indifference by non-Indians was the basis for all policies, including education. Cultural ethno-centrism by non-Indians was the basis for de-valuing diversity.

The real solution to creative policy building for teaching diversity will require a commitment of federal funds. The obstacles to such creative policy formulation is system set. The system, this federal bureaucracy, was not conceived as a flexible policy tool. It

is, in fact, the opposite. Regardless of the fact that the policies reflect people and those people may, indeed, be flexible, the development of federal Indian educational policies can be viewed as a miniature representation of the debate that is the focus of educational policy in the society as a whole. This debate centers around the development of such vocabulary as "effective" schools and "choice". There is a general call for reform that is echoed by theorists who search for "new paradigms." Efforts are afoot to create the next educational "bandwagon."

Education for the 21st Century

In asserting its place in the twenty first century, Indian education has already begun to look back and assess the changes in the twentieth. The tribal college movement has begun a twenty year "retrospective" led by Sinte Gleska on the Rosebud Reservation (Bordeaux, 1991). Federally supported colleges have begun to reassess curricula with program improvement and Vision 2000. Tribal chairmen appointed to the Department of Interior's Task Force on Restructuring the Bureau of Indian Affairs have called for legislation aimed at re-evaluating all of the Bureau's educational activities.

Internal attempts aimed at upgrading the quality of education for all Indian youth have resulted in improvement, especially in the numbers of American Indian teachers, supervisors and administrators. With these increased numbers has come a new focus on developing sensitivity to the special needs of students from diverse backgrounds This sensitivity can be seen most often in the assessment not only of *what* to teach for cultural relevance, but *how* to teach American Indians in ways that are compatible with their diversity (Little Soldier, 1989).

Further review of the last century would indicate that in the past twenty years there has been an unprecedented involvement of Indians at all levels in the development of policy. Never before have there been so many opportunities for Indians to be involved in the definition of issues or in the implementation of solutions. While Beaulieu (1991) notes that this involvement has not impacted statistical representations of Indians in higher

education, he further notes that the successes are personal and that the unprecedented direct Indian involvement in education will stand out in future assessments of this century.

Some professors involved in the Conference in Tempe, Arizona (1991) asserted that while certain areas of economy and policy and technology did in fact progress in the twentieth century, other areas such as sociology (professors in soft sciences) have not moved toward solving or even defining cultural pluralism within Indian communities. This lack of definition or assessment was viewed as crippling to future research in Indian education.

POLICY IMPLICATIONS

The politics of teaching and learning diversity indeed require a new perspective. This perspective can incorporate our own diversities in philosophies and cultures and yet should emphasize the uniqueness of American Indians as a group. As we continue to move toward a century that promises more technological development, Indian people retain control of more than one-third of the country's low-sulphur, strippable coal and over half of the native uranium reserves (Le Brasseur, 1979). These considerations, along with the major role that land continues to play in determining the economic structure of this country, infer that American Indians potentially have the capital available to assist themselves economically (Robbins, 1983). It is equally important that Indian people combine western teachings with cultural preservation to protect the gains realized from the efforts of a system which has been forced to change through legislation (P. L. 93-638) and through a new political climate which recognizes the value of diversity . The tools to be used in the creation of a new "paradigm" can been found in the wealth of allied Indian nations, in the continued growth of college enrollments, and in the re-valuing of our selves and our own diversities.

Contemporary Indian writers now call for a coalition of Indian peoples which acknowledges the diversity among all Indians and encourages Indian people to recognize

self-stereotypes (Butterfield and Scheirbeck, 1980). Finally, in assessing the practical implications of politics for the twenty-first century, it is imperative that research and policy-development in Indian education be done by American Indians (Ryan and Spence, 1978; Brown, 1980). More recently, educators (LaFromboise and Plake, 1983; Warner and Seaberg, 1990) have proposed a curricular integration focusing on educational research by American Indians. To this end, the Indian Nations At Risk Task Force (1990) has established guidelines for governing the policies and recommendations which will be issued later this year. These principles include the following:

> --Educational strategies and reforms that will be needed to achieve our national education goals must guide improvement in all schools that serve American Indian/Alaska Native students.
>
> --American Indian/Alaska Native children and adults are entitled to the benefits of high-quality education and training through access to challenging curriculum and instruction and adequate facilities.
>
> --American Indians/Alaska Natives should be given the opportunity and skills needed to move freely between Native and dominant cultures and to contribute to the society in which they now live.

The principles require a genuine commitment not only from school systems serving Indian students, but also from tribal governments, educational organizations, community organizations, and businesses. The Task Force promises to review the role of post-secondary institutions in Indian communities. It will assess the contributions and functions of these institutions to Native communities. This assessment will relate to opportunities for continuing education, the preservation of culturally and historically valuable materials, and leadership and role model development. This commitment to quality and equality should dominate the politics of Indian education in the century ahead.

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